Dek Unu Magazine

March 2025

Kintsugi

Kuro

Cover: Can We Stop Here? ©Kuro

Eleven

This is *Dek Unu Magazine*. In Esperanto, dek unu means "eleven." Eleven images from a single artist. Eleven artists in eleven solo issues in each publication year. Dek Unu publishes the work of a new artist-photographer in each issue. The artist's work and words are featured in individual focus as the sole purpose for each issue of the magazine. Unlike other arts and letters magazines which might look for work from a variety of artists to support an editorial staff's theme, at Dek Unu, theme and imagery are always each artist's own.

This Month

Recently a field of websites has bloomed that use “artificial intelligence” to create headshots from uploaded selfies, for resumés, applications, and other self-marketing. The input pictures are mixed and massaged into a portrait by A.I., which typically selects an appropriate background, costume, and pose to fit its purpose. Three-button and pants suit corporate hopefuls, open collar business casual salespeople, or even actors, writers, and creatives can, from a couple of snapshots, have images made to order. The large language model is trained to know what each headshot “should” look like. The result is, quite reliably, a mask—blemishes blended, coiffure cut and combed, and most of the truth “corrected."

Jamaican-American photographer Kuro, like others among the best fine art portrait-makers, is not interested in the mask or any conventionalized replica of reality. His work, posed or candid, digs in to tell the deeper story of its subjects and, inevitably, the story of the artist as well. Each image is an intimate visual narrative: rediscovery after losing love, yearning for unattainable moments, or finding safety in a familiar space during life’s upheavals. Inspired by *kintsugi*, the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold to make new art, Kuro's photography is grown from his difficult personal history and the collective memory of Black experiences. His art honors the cracks and fractures of life. His work is a love letter to the complexity, resilience, and beauty of Blackness.

In Kuro’s own words, “Through *Kintsugi*, I hope to show that our scars, no matter how deep, can be mended into something even more meaningful. This project is my story, pieced together through my lens, and it’s a reminder that there is profound beauty in embracing our imperfections.”

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - Afternoon

A cozy room bathed in warm, late-afternoon light. Bookshelves line the walls, and a soft hum of instrumental music plays in the background. Kuro sits on a plush couch, their hands fidgeting with the hem of their shirt. Across from them, the Therapist leans forward slightly, their notepad resting on their lap.

THERAPIST: Let's start with a moment that really stood out for you. Describe a time when everything felt... overwhelming.

KURO: (*takes a deep breath*) It came out of nowhere. One minute I was fine, and the next... it was like my body just shut down. I sat in my car, crying so hard I couldn't breathe. I don't even know how long I was there.

THERAPIST: What were you feeling in that moment?

KURO: Like I wasn't enough. Like if I'd just been better – stonger – I could've handled it all. Instead, I was pleading with myself for peace, just begging for it for just one moment.

THERAPIST: How did you take care of yourself afterward?.

KURO: (*laughs*) I didn't. I drowned it out with food. A buffalo chicken calzone. The whole thing. The crumbs are still in my car. It was... sad, honestly.

THERAPIST: When you feel overwhelmed, how do you process it?

KURO: I retreat into my head. I see life like a movie, and I get to be the director. But when it's bad... it's like the end of Blade Runner 2049.

THERAPIST: Tell me about that scene.

KURO: It's snowing, and everything's falling apart. The main character just lies there, staring at the sky, letting it all wash over him. That's me when it's too much. I can't fix anything, so I just... exist. Barely.

When It Was Too Much

THERAPIST: You've talked about moments that felt heavy. Can you share one that felt light? Something that made you feel alive?

KURO: (*smiling softly*) There was this person. Their touch... it was like electricity. It wasn't just physical—it was spiritual. Their hands on mine, our breaths syncing up. I've never felt that connected to someone before.

THERAPIST: What did that connection mean to you?

KURO: It was my everything. For once, I didn't feel alone. I felt... whole, like I could take on the world. I miss that. I miss them.

THERAPIST: You mentioned a moment of crisis earlier. Can you tell me more about it?

KURO: There was this time with one of my best friends. His car engine overheated, and we thought we could fix it. But when we opened the hood... the engine exploded. Coolant sprayed everywhere, and his arms –

THERAPIST: (*picking up on their hesitation)* What happened next?

KURO: My brain just... jumped into action. I ran into the gas station and bought a jug of water to rinse his arms. I didn't think; I just did it. The ambulance came, and his mom... she thanked me. She said, "Thank you for being there for my son." I'll never forget her face.

Ms. Loftis

VANS

THERAPIST: You've mentioned feeling disconnected from your art. What's that like for you?

KURO: I hate photography sometimes. It feels heavy, like a weight pressing down on me. It was supposed to be fun, you know? But now... it feels like a job I never signed up for.

THERAPIST: What keeps you going?

KURO: (*smiles faintly*) The little things. Like walking with my brother and best friend, spotting a random blue wall, and thinking, "That's cool." Moments like that remind me why I started.

Can We Stop Here?

THERAPIST: What inspires you to create?

KURO: (*pauses*) For a long time, I didn't think anyone cared about my story. I was stuck trying to make things for other people, to impress them. But then my friend called me one day.

THERAPIST: What did he say?

KURO: (*grinning*) He said, "Can I model for you today? I trust your vision." Just like that. No agenda, no expectations. That call changed everything.

THERAPIST: You've talked about nostalgia. What does it mean to you?

KURO: It's like a time machine, taking me back to the good parts of my childhood. Like skateboarding with my brother at this terrible playground. We'd drink Arizona teas, rip our church pants trying to land tricks, and laugh until our stomachs hurt.

THERAPIST: Do you go back often?

KURO: Not really. It's hard. I feel like I've let everyone down. Like I've got nothing to show for their belief in me.

THERAPIST: Do you think they feel that way?

KURO: (smiling faintly) No. Every time I go back, they treat me like I'm some kind of superhero.

MAKE
MONEY

THERAPIST: How's your relationship with your family?

KURO: Complicated. They think I'm secretive because I don't share much. But when they tell me they're proud of me... it means the world.

THERAPIST: Do you think they know that?

KURO: (*sighs*) I hope so. I really do.

SimmsPryce

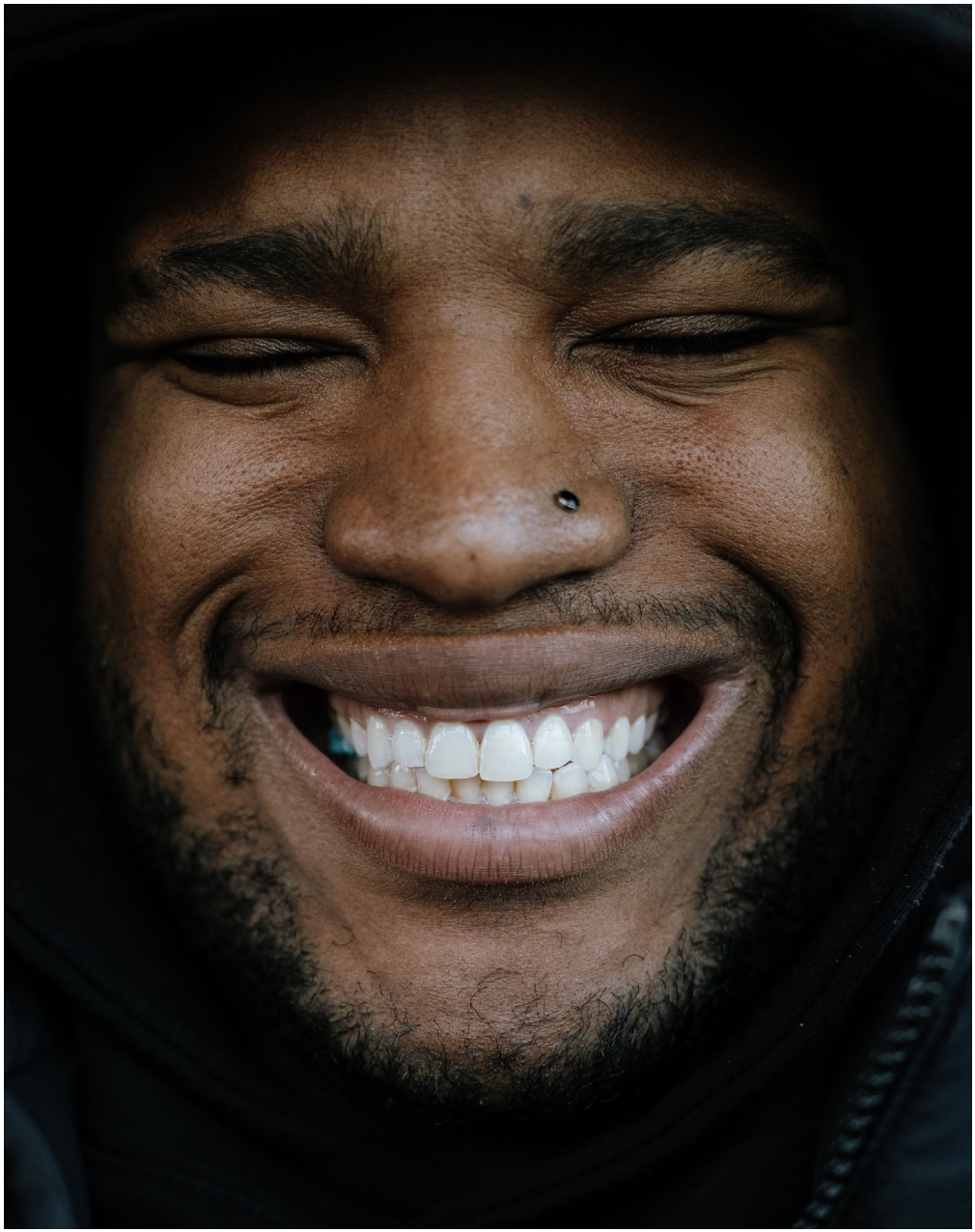
THERAPIST: You seem restless today. What's going on?

KURO: My mind won't stop. It's like... this constant noise. I just want it to be quiet for once.

THERAPIST: What's the hardest part about that?

KURO: I used to be able to hide it, you know? Pretend I was fine. But now... people see it. They see the sadness, and they connect with it.

Life Isn't Worth Living



THERAPIST: And how does that make you feel?

KURO: Like I've found kinship in my pain. But maybe that's the problem.

THERAPIST: If you could leave one message behind, what would it be?

KURO: (*softly, after a long pause*) Choose to see what's left of me – I'd like you to accept me for what I am. Broken, yet in the process of kintsugi.

- F.S Yousaf

Gold Laden

Artist Interview - Kuro

Do you remember the first decent photo you made? Quite a few artists we've published still have a print of that one!

The first decent photo I ever took was a self-portrait in my bathroom mirror after I spent an entire paycheck on a 35mm prime lens. I remember being blown away by how much a lens could change the look of an image, it was the first time I really saw the potential in photography. I felt so proud of myself

Kuro

in that moment, realizing that if I kept at it, I could actually be a photographer. Unfortunately, that photo has never been published or printed. I don't even think I shot it in RAW, but it still holds a special place in my journey.

Where did the journey start? What's your origin story?

I was born in Kingston, Jamaica, to a young mother and an absent father. I don't remember much of my time there since I left when I was about four years old. I was raised in Boston by my mother's parents, where I was a quiet child who mostly kept to myself. I didn't realize it then, but I struggled with an

unusual amount of anxiety, which made me feel most at ease around my grandparents, a few close friends, and my little brother who eventually became my closest friend and confidant. As I grew older, I did my best to be more outgoing in whatever ways I could, but I always leaned toward the nerdy side, and high school can be a cruel place when you lack confidence. Ironically, despite everything, I wasn't particularly artistic as a kid—I was more fascinated by how things worked. I used to tell my grandmother that I was going to be an inventor when I grew up. It wasn't until my later high school years that I began to loosen anxiety's grip on me, thanks to a supportive community of friends. That's also when I started tapping into my creative side. It all began in a general art class with one of my best friends, Malik, as we brainstormed ideas for a clothing brand called Squad of Cthulhu (we were deep into H.P. Lovecraft at the time). From that moment on, I just wanted to create anything and everything. Even now, I'm still that quiet little kid at heart. I've just learned how to move through the world a little differently.

You live in Boston now. What's it like for you as a resident? As an artist?

I love this city, but having spent my entire life here, I sometimes feel like I'm destined to complain about it. There's a familiarity that can feel both comforting and stifling, a sense of knowing a place so well that you start to see its limitations more than its possibilities. But despite that, Boston has shaped me in ways I can't ignore. There's a quiet beauty here, hidden in the streets. It's the place that taught me how to look for beauty in everything, even in the most unexpected places. As an artist, though, Boston can be a difficult space to navigate. The creative scene often feels like a race to prove yourself rather than a space to simply create.

Any pivotal events early on? Turning points for a kid?

A lot of those are deeply personal, things I still hold close but what I can say is that I don't think I got to be a kid for very long. Being my brother's keeper was a role I took on early, and while I love him more than anything, it was a lot to carry while also trying to figure out my own place in the world. My grandparents meant well, but there was always this expectation that, as the oldest, I needed to have things figured out. That I had to be responsible, capable, prepared. And with that came a weight—one that made me feel trapped in a box I didn't build. It also kept me from taking risks. That part is on me, but at the same time, no child should have to feel the weight of the world on their shoulders. That kind of pressure shapes you in ways you don't fully understand until much later.

Day jobs? Formative work adventures? Lessons learned?

My first official job was at a deli when I was 17, and I worked grueling hours—60 hours a week as a part-time employee. I hated it, but my work ethic was incredible because I had seen my grandparents work tirelessly and I tried to mirror that. I never called out, no matter how exhausted I was. After that, I got a job at a pizza place in the neighborhood where I grew up, and the hours were just as insane. I only had one day off a week, which really burned me out, but no matter how exhausted I was, I always made time for photography. When I wasn't working, all I wanted to do was take photos. Those jobs taught me early on that I'm a hard worker, and if I set my mind to something, I could accomplish it.

How did you break into the art world? Drive? Luck? Both?

While I was at the pizza place, I became obsessed with the idea of working in the arts. So, I started applying for entry-level positions at museums around the city and ended up

landing a job as a gallery attendant at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Spending so much time surrounded by art, I started trying to recreate Renaissance pieces in my own work. Two things became clear to me during that time: First, recreating those works wasn't my style; and second, I really wish I could paint, because I'd love to redo those masterpieces with Black people as the subjects. Which set me on a path of creating original work that felt timeless in the same way.

Having worked in museums for a very long time, I see a definite barrier between me and the ones who populate them. Their "art historical" mindset shuts out the common man. It pushed me to be an artist who can be understood on every level. I want both a kid and an old man to appreciate the things I'm trying to say.

Your work has both personal and socially-conscious aspects. Describe your target audience and the message you want to send.

At the core of it, I make my work for Black people. Art, especially photography, is a medium still largely dominated by our white counterparts, and I want to create images that reflect the fullness of my community. The softness, the rawness, the joy, the depression, the love—every part of our

experience deserves to be seen. I can only speak from my own perspective, and as a young Black man in America raised by Jamaican grandparents, I have a lot to say—and even more to keep learning. My goal is to break the boxes that society tries to put people like me in, to challenge the narrow ways we're often represented and honestly, the fine art world needs more Black art. I'm tired of walking into museums and only seeing work that resonates with me as part of a curated effort to be "progressive." That work should be there all the time, not as an exception, but as an essential part of the artistic landscape. I hope that one day, something I create ends up in a space like that—not as a statement piece, but simply because it belongs and maybe some little Black kid will point at it and say, "Hey, that reminds me of me."

Who get to see your new work first? A trusted associate whose editorial advice is useful, confirming… worth hearing?

My little brother is the first person I run my work by, he's also my biggest source of inspiration. He's a fashion designer working out of NYC under the moniker "Musty," and the way he turns his clothing into a performance piece, telling stories about our childhood, the Black experience, or even his own struggles with depression pushes me to keep creating. He's a genius and I trust his insight completely. Any input he gives me, I take seriously because I know it comes from a place of deep understanding, both of me and of the art we're both trying to put into the world.

Talk your photography training. Formal? Informal? Do you work in other media as well?

I don't have any formal photography training. The only structured artistic education I've had was a single art class in high school. But one of the beautiful things about growing up in this era is that you can teach yourself anything with enough

curiosity and YouTube. When I bought my first camera, I was obsessed. I carried it with me everywhere, shooting anything and everything that caught my eye. I became consumed with learning how to capture different subjects, studying techniques online, and experimenting with every shooting style I came across. What's always fascinated me about photography is how deeply personal it is and how you can see the soul of a photographer in their work. Trying to understand

and recreate that essence became a challenge I loved. My approach to photography is straightforward. I don't rely on elaborate setups or techniques just a deep understanding of *Lightroom* and an obsession with cinematic lighting, heavily influenced by my favorite films. Recently, I've started diving into videography, and it's quickly becoming another obsession. There's something about storytelling through video that feels like a natural extension of photography like the first frame of a film, where an entire story is waiting to unfold.

Where do good ideas come from? What helps?

A lot of the way I think and the way I create comes from my obsession with TV and movies. I have a habit of trying to

sitcomify everything, and that instinct naturally bleeds into how I shoot. I used to approach my work by shooting first and then shaping it into a concept afterward, which was fun in its own way. But now, I prefer starting with a feeling—visualizing an emotion from the very beginning. I ask myself: If this were a scene in a television show, what would be the best way to portray this feeling? Sometimes, an image will appear in my mind like a dream; other times, I'll remember a moment from a film or show that moved me, then reinterpret it through my own lens. I'm not entirely sure what fuels this process, but I know my love for music plays a role. I have a decent vinyl collection, and there's something about the way sound shapes emotion that influences how I see images. Old anime films have also had a huge impact—there's a certain nostalgia and depth in their storytelling that I think has helped shape the way I perceive emotion in media.

I'd say my workflow leans more toward the impulsive and disorganized side. My ideas usually come in the moment because I create based on my feelings, whatever I'm experiencing right then and there, I have to get out. Most of the time, I'll have a friend around to help bring it to life, but if not, I'll use myself as the subject. From idea to finished product, I've learned to always trust my process. Even if the original thought doesn't turn out exactly as I envisioned, I find a way to shape it into something that feels true to me. No matter where I start, I know I'll land on my vision in the end.

We often claim that "the critics" don't matter, that we don't care what others think as long as we're happy.

I once put together a photo book just a collection of pictures I had taken, thrown together without much thought. I printed it and brought it to work to share with my boss at the time, who happened to be a photo curator. She flipped through it, looked

at me, and said one sentence that stuck with me ever since: "These are cool photos, but it doesn't seem like there's a story here—so why should I care?" That moment completely changed how I approach my work. Since then, I've been extremely intentional about how I present my photography. It's not just about capturing great images—it's about giving them a reason to connect.

What kind of critic are you? Are you a tough sell? What do you look for in new work you see? What do you like? What do you avoid?

I don't think I'm a tough sell when it comes to other people's work. If I can see passion and emotion in a piece, I'll most likely enjoy it, there's something powerful about work that feels deeply personal. On a personal level, I'm drawn to portraits of any kind, anything with a cinematic quality, and hyperrealism in painting. I love work that reveals unexpected sides of people, things you wouldn't notice just by looking at them in everyday life. There's something special about art that makes you see someone, or even the world, in a new way.

For some it's the rejections, for others it's the time and money. What is the biggest challenge you face? What's most rewarding?

The biggest challenge is staying motivated to create. Being an artist means constantly balancing survival with making work that feels meaningful, and that struggle can be exhausting. There have been so many moments where I've questioned whether I still cared enough to keep going, times when it felt like I had to choose between stability and putting everything on the line for the medium I love but the most rewarding part is finally feeling seen. When people connect with my work, when they tell me they've felt the same way, or even just that a piece moved them it reminds me why I do this. Knowing that my emotions are coming through in what I create, that something I made resonates with someone else, makes all the struggle feel worth it.

Is there a commercial side to your work? Editorial, event, news, marketing?

Oh, I take the term starving artist quite literally. If there's a photography job available, I'll usually take it. At the end of the day, you have to find a way to fund the art you want to create, and for me, this is part of that process. That said, I have a strong preference for editorial work. My brother is a fashion designer, so I've naturally become immersed in that world. Being surrounded by it has shaped the way I see and capture images, blending my love for storytelling with the energy and artistry of fashion.

It's not all about the gear but vision only becomes real through the craft. What hardware, software, or intangibles are indispensible?

For a long time, my entire setup consisted of a starter Nikon camera, a 35mm prime lens, and Lightroom Mobile because I didn't even own a computer. After every shoot, I'd plug an SD card reader into my phone, upload my photos, and spend hours tweaking each one in Lightroom. Some of my favorite work to this day comes from that period. When you have a vision in your head, you learn to get creative with whatever

tools you have. The world becomes your playground, and you realize just how much you can do with very little. I still stick to a prime lens, though now I use a 50mm, and *Lightroom* remains indispensable to my process. If I have those two things, I know I can create something great no matter what.

I shoot fully digital. I have shot film, and I know the process of developing as one of the people from my past was a film photographer and taught me the things they knew so there was a year I carried around a Nikon with a fixed 35mm lens and only shot film. There's a rawness to film that digital will just never be able to capture at all. I do want to learn how to shoot on the giant size polaroids though if I ever picked up analog again. I was gifted one from a coworker and when I tell you it's one of the most amazing things I have ever seen in my life.

Does "finished" mean printed? Is "posted" enough? What role does electronic publication play in your plan?

I don't think finished has to mean printed especially in the world of digital photography. To me, a piece feels complete when I'm comfortable sharing it with the world. Social media plays a huge role in that now; it's the vehicle that gets your work out there, whether for promotion or simply connecting with people when you don't have other avenues to showcase what you create. When I do print my work, it's usually for an art show. I rely on my local camera shop, Hunt's Photo, to handle all my printing needs. But in November, I hosted my own art show, and a friend of mine, a photography professor at Harvard, let me use the printers there. It was my first time going through the full process of printing my own work, and it was incredibly rewarding to have that level of control over the final product.

Social media is incredibly damaging to my mental health, but it's also a necessary tool especially as an artist without an established network to help get my work seen. The reach it provides is undeniable. I can share something, and within an hour, 7,000 people might see it. When you really think about it, that kind of access is amazing but the downside is hard to ignore. The Internet is oversaturated and often toxic, and it's so easy to fall into the trap of comparison, competing with people you don't even know because your insecurities convince you that your work isn't good enough. It's a constant balancing act, trying to use the platform for what it can offer without letting it distort the reason I create in the first place.

What's next? A new project? Travel? Milestones to reach?

I am currently working on another series of photos for a solo show that I am hoping to put together by the end of summer called "RIOT." It will be tackling the darker sides of my mental health and how that affects my relationships with other people, myself and just overall the destruction my brain can and has caused me. The name is drawn from a song by Artist Earl Sweatshirt who in turn got the song from his uncle Hugh Masekela a south African jazz artist. It's a pretty upbeat song and the reason I have it as the title is because I tend to mask a lot so this will be a very vulnerable series for me to create. Otherwise, I am working on a script for a short film which doesn't have a release date at this point but something on the horizon for me.I'm in the process of building a collective called "Ordinary" something people should definitely keep an eye on. My goal is to shift away from just being a recognizable face and instead build something bigger than myself—an artist and a collective that people know.

It's easy to get caught up in chasing recognition, constantly measuring yourself against others instead of focusing on the work

itself. And I won't lie I've been there. I'd love to be a renowned artist, to see my prints hanging in museums, to have my work reach people on a massive scale. But I've also learned how dangerous it can be to let that kind of validation be the driving force behind my art. For a long time, it was. I was lucky enough to have my ego shattered. And yes, lucky because if that hadn't happened, I don't think I would have ever made work that truly speaks to my soul. Losing that sense of external validation as a motivator forced me to reconnect with why I create in the first place. Now, my work isn't about chasing prestige it's about telling stories, capturing moments, and making something that feels real to me.

Contact

Keep up with Kuro at instagram.com/kurothehomie and at www.kurothehomie.com.

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